

TRAVEL

# Branson, Missouri – Live Entertainment Capital of the World

With more than 100 live shows daily, plus tons of attractions and scenic tours, your greatest challenge in Branson will be finding the time to do it all. Perhaps that's why more



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than three-quarters of visitors return. Set against the backdrop of the Ozark Mountains, Branson is as beautiful as it is diverse. Those who love golf and outdoor adventure will find opportunities abound.

**Silver Dollar City – Crafters in Paradise**

Visiting this vast theme park is like taking a step back in time to an 1880s village filled with artisans, rides and shows. What I liked best about Silver Dollar City was watching the craftspeople. Sixty unique shops showcase pioneer crafts – from silversmiths and glassmakers to woodcarvers, bakers and candy makers. I even watched a culinary demonstration on making cinnamon rolls. (Tasting was the best part.)

Throughout the year, the park also hosts bluegrass, gospel and other music festivals. Summer brings the opening of White Water Park, while you can cruise from spring through December aboard the Showboat Branson Belle on Table Rock Lake. [Silverdollarcity.com](http://Silverdollarcity.com), [bransonwhitewater.com](http://bransonwhitewater.com).

**The Best of Branson**

Branson is a perfect blend of old and new. Take a stroll down to Dick's Old Time Five and Dime in historic downtown, and then keep going until you run into Branson

Landing – an open air dining, entertainment and shopping complex along the Taneycomo Lakefront. I stayed at the Hilton Branson Convention Center Hotel, with its luxury accommodations, fabulous Level 2 steakhouse and great location.

**Ride the Branson Scenic Railway**

Hop aboard the Branson Scenic Rail, right across from the Hilton Branson. You'll enjoy exploring vintage cars while making the 40-mile round trip ride through Ozark foothills, tunnels and bridges. This is a popular excursion, so reservations are recommended. [Bransontrain.com](http://Bransontrain.com).

**Duck Rides**

It's hard to believe, but these amphibious World War II vehicles can go from land to water and back again. The Duck Captain was a hoot and the ride was awesome as I held my breath, splashing in to Table Rock Lake to cruise.

**The "Show Me" State**

When it comes to shows, take your pick – rock n' roll, country, comedy, variety and well-known performers. Can you believe Branson has more theater seats than Broadway? I also heard one theatregoer say that she took in 10 shows in a week. It's easy to do when performances start in the morning and run until after the glittering lights come on.

Like the '70s? Head to the John Denver, Neil Diamond or Eagles cover shows. Playing at Dick Clark's American Bandstand Theater, Legends in Concert features tributes to Buddy Holly, Dolly Parton, Michael Jackson and more.

For variety, you can't miss with the Andy Williams Show, complete with a Moon



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See vintage cars and ride thru the Ozark foothills on the popular Branson Scenic Rail.

River right in front of the theatre. The Irish Tenors astound with their glorious sounds of opera, pop, and classical music. The Hughes Brothers have been billed as the "world's largest performing family," featuring their own brand of music and comedy.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Shoji Tabuchi Show, an amazing, take-the-house down performance. The theatre itself is considered the "Showplace of Branson" and the bathrooms, well, they're award-winning, too.

"show you" a great time. [Branson.com](http://Branson.com).

*Mira Temkin is a Highland-Park based freelance writer whose articles have appeared in Chicago Tribune, Family Time Magazine, and six-00-three-five magazine. In addition, she's a high-energy copywriter working with advertising and marketing services clients. She can be reached at [miratemkin@gmail.com](mailto:miratemkin@gmail.com).*

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No matter when you go, Branson will

## Special Needs, Special Times

It's almost Valentine's Day, and what better way to say "I love you" than to spend quality time with the loved ones in your life?

A great place for family fun is Wagner Farm in Glenview. My son Joey and I are big horse and vehicle people, so this combination working dairy and truck farm is a guaranteed good time.

From 10:30-11:30am Feb. 22, the farm hosts one of its Crafty Calves sessions. Both youth and adult visitors are invited to come out and muck it up with the farm's pig. Other animals are featured throughout winter, with horses on hand in March. The experience wraps up with a special animal craft souvenir. [Glenviewparks.org](http://Glenviewparks.org).

I bet you and your special needs loved one crave warm comfort food these days. There's nothing quite like a steaming bowl of spicy chili or creamy, homemade mac-and-cheese to take the chill off. The Young Chefs Academy in Glenview teaches children ages 4-14 how to make these perennial favorites. Lessons are taught in a safe environment, encouraging discovery and creativity.

What I like about the Young Chefs Academy is how it focuses on empowering children in a unique way. The Winter II session of weekly classes begins Feb. 28 with "Julia...Our Way!" The eight-week program brings the legendary Julia Child's flair for French cuisine to your home kitchen. [Youngchefsacademy.com/glenview](http://Youngchefsacademy.com/glenview).

As regular readers know, my Joey has autism, so my eyes and ears perked up when I learned that Autism Family Travel recently endorsed the Key Lime Cove waterpark in Gurnee. In particular, it said that the park "is set up very well for families with autistic children." And that's in addition to being awarded readers' choice as "Best Indoor Waterpark" and "Best Family Value."

I know you're thinking, "Why is Steve

talking about waterparks in February?" Key Lime is completely indoors, making it an enjoyable destination year-round. In addition to all the water fun, the park also boasts 10,000 square feet of entertainment, including the RipTide Reef Arcade, the Leapin' Lizards artistic adventure spot, Pinki's Pet Palace, a Sunset Festival parade and the Paradise Mist Spa for adults. [Keylimecove.com](http://Keylimecove.com).

If you'd like to see your organization's activities and services featured in upcoming reports, please email your calendar of events and information to: [steven@joride.com](mailto:steven@joride.com).

Contributed by Steven Cohen

Email questions and comments to [editorial@whats happeningonline.com](mailto:editorial@whats happeningonline.com).



See animals at Glenview's Wagner Farm.

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